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"Express Mail" mailing label number EL608558012US
Date of Deposit September 13, 2000

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Docket No.: GR 98 P 1320

Date: September 13, 2000

Hon. Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks
Washington, D.C. 20231

Sir:

Enclosed herewith are the necessary papers for filing the following application for Letters Patent:

Applicant : GERNOT GÖDL ET AL.

Title : METHOD OF GROUNDING A PHOTOBLANK TO A HOLDING DEVICE

2 sheets of formal drawings in triplicate.

A check in the amount of \$ 690.00 covering the filing fee.

PCT Publication (cover sheet only).

This application is being filed without a signed oath or declaration under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.53(d). Applicants await notification of the date by which the oath or declaration and the surcharge are due, pursuant to this rule.

The Patent and Trademark Office is hereby given authority to charge Deposit Account No. 12-1099 of Lerner and Greenberg, P.A. for any fees due or deficiencies of payments made for any purpose during the pendency of the above-identified application.

Respectfully submitted,



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LAG:kc



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METHOD OF GROUNDING A PHOTOBANK TO A HOLDING DEVICE

5 Cross-Reference to Related Application:

This is a continuation of copending International Application PCT/DE99/00675, filed March 11, 1999, which designated the United States.

10 Background of the Invention:

Field of the Invention:

The invention relates to a method of fixing and grounding a photobank in a holding device.

15 During the manufacture of photomasks for photolithographic processes, so-called photobanks are used as the starting material. These photobanks are polished quartz plates which are coated with a layer of chromium and a layer of photoresist applied above the chromium layer. The photobank is irradiated
20 with an electron beam in an electron-beam writer. The desired mask pattern is thereby transferred to the photobank. During this irradiation, the photobank must be grounded. Otherwise, static charges can be formed in the area of its surface and influence the electron beam in an undesired way as it is
25 drawing the pattern.

It has been known, heretofore, in order to ground the photoblack, to use a grounding spring which is applied to the cassette in which the photoblack is inserted during irradiation. When the photoblack is loaded into the cassette,

5 the photoblack is pushed under the grounding spring, the spring making electrical contact with the chromium layer, destroying the photoresist layer and the chromium layer locally. In this case, the fact that the destruction of these layers leads to the formation of particles is disadvantageous.

10 These particles can lead to the covering or distortion of the electron beam, which results in the formation of chromium islands (chromium spots) and the occurrence of positional errors. Repairing such faulty masks is possible only with a considerable outlay, or it is even impossible. While chromium

15 spots which have occurred can be removed by means of evaporation with the aid of a laser beam in repair systems conceived specifically for the purpose, although there is a high risk of damage to adjacent structures, the positional errors effected by distortion of the electron beam are

20 irreparable.

A further disadvantage of the conventional grounding springs is that it is not infrequent for an undefined electrical contact to occur, which can result in poor grounding. This

25 also leads to erroneous positioning of the electron beam and therefore to an irreparable mask defect.

Summary of the Invention:

It is accordingly an object of the invention to provide a method for grounding photoblanks in a holding device, which
5 overcomes the above-mentioned disadvantages of the heretofore-known devices and methods of this general type and which enables the manufacture of a high yield of masks without faults, and which method results in an increase in the yield of defect-free masks during manufacture.

10 With the foregoing and other objects in view there is provided, in accordance with the invention, a method of grounding a photobank provided with an electrically conductive layer in a holding device, which comprises:

15 positioning the photobank on a supporting surface of a holding device;

providing a leaf spring with a contact-making tip mounted thereon;

20 lowering the contact-making tip onto a surface of the photobank in a controlled manner with a position-adjusting element, which is connected to the leaf spring and forms an adjustable stop on the holding device, by adjusting the position-adjusting element by a defined amount, whereby the contact-making tip is lowered onto the surface of the

photoblack and penetrates the surface with a predetermined impressing pressure.

In accordance with an added feature of the invention, prior to mounting the leaf spring on the holding device, the position-adjusting element is turned sufficiently far into a threaded hole formed in the leaf spring for securing a spacing.

With the above and other objects in view there is also provided, in accordance with the invention, a method of grounding a photoblack provided with an electrically conductive layer in a holding device, which comprises:

positioning a photoblack on a supporting surface of a holding device;

providing a leaf spring with a contact-making tip fitted thereto;

mounting and prepositioning a position-adjusting element on the leaf spring for forming an adjustable stop on the holding device;

holding the leaf spring away from the surface of the photoblack with an element other than the position-adjusting element; and

subsequently to positioning the photoblack, lowering the leaf spring onto the photoblack controlled manner;

whereby a final-position travel is predefined by the pre-positioned position-adjusting element.

5

In accordance with an additional feature of the invention, the position-adjusting element is a setting screw.

In accordance with another feature of the invention, a position of the photoblack is fixed with one or more hold-downs fitted to the holding device and the photoblack is clamped firmly with pressure on the surface of the photoblack.

In accordance with a further feature of the invention, in an unstressed state, the leaf spring is formed with a bend at which a longitudinal extent of the leaf spring deviates by an angle α from a rectilinear course. In a preferred embodiment, the angle α is between 2° and 15° .

As a result of avoiding any lateral relative movement between the contact-making tip and the photoblack as the tip is brought down, the flaking of constituents of the layer, and therefore undesired particle formation, is largely ruled out as the tip is placed onto the surface layers of the photoblack and penetrates into them. The formation of the grounding

contact is carried out by impressing the tip into a surface-layer area of the photoblack with little damage, any "scratching" at the surface being avoided.

5 A further significant advantage of the invention resides in the fact that the grounding element according to the invention brings about the defined and reliable formation of an electrical contact, and therefore constantly good grounding.

10 According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, the grounding element is formed as a leaf spring which can be fixed at its one end to the holding body and is provided at its other end with the contact-making spring. In this case, an advantageous design variant is distinguished by the fact that,
15 in the unstressed state, the leaf spring has a bend at which the longitudinal extent of the leaf spring deviates by an angle α from a straight course. In this case, given a suitable selection of the angle α , the dimensioning of the leaf spring and a suitable material selection, the spring characteristic
20 of the leaf spring can be set as desired.

In addition, a position-adjusting element is expediently fitted to the leaf spring and forms an adjustable stop on the holding device. In this way, the stroke of the contact-making
25 tip over the photoblack can be predefined in a defined way,

and it is also possible to monitor the action of bringing the tip down by actuating the positioning element.

The contact-making tip is preferably formed from a hard material with a good electrical conductivity, in particular a hard metal. As a result, high freedom from wear and dimensional stability of the tip, as well as a low electrical resistance of the same, are ensured.

10 According to a preferred design variant, the contact-making tip is designed as a polygonal tip, in which at least one edge is a cutting edge. As a result, on the one hand relatively large-area contact-making areas are available between the edges, as a result of which the electrical contact resistance can be kept low and the reproducibility of the same is also increased. On the other hand, as a result of the cutting edge being sharp, the cutting penetration of the tip into the surface layers is guaranteed, which considerably reduces the risk of layer components flaking away as a result of the lateral displacement of material.

Although, in principle, a single grounding element already provides grounding which is adequate in practice, the provision of a number of grounding elements increases the grounding reliability further, and also achieves redundancy with regard to grounding failures.

As noted above, it is preferred for the photoblack to first be fixed in its end position on the holding device, and for the contact-making tip of the grounding element to be subsequently brought down essentially in the direction normal to the plane of the supporting surface.

Other features which are considered as characteristic for the invention are set forth in the appended claims.

Although the invention is illustrated and described herein as embodied in a holding device for photoblanks, it is nevertheless not intended to be limited to the details shown, since various modifications and structural changes may be made therein without departing from the spirit of the invention and within the scope and range of equivalents of the claims.

The construction and method of operation of the invention, however, together with additional objects and advantages thereof will be best understood from the following description of specific embodiments when read in connection with the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings:

Fig. 1 is a partial sectional view of a cassette having an inserted photoblack and applied grounding spring with leaf spring and contact-making tip;

5

Fig. 2 is a top plan view of the configuration of in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3a is a sectional illustration of the leaf spring illustrated in Fig. 1;

10

Fig. 3b is a plan view of the leaf spring of Fig. 3a;

Fig. 4a is a partial plan view of the grounding spring of Fig. 1 in the area of the contact-making tip; and

15

Fig. 4b is a side view of the tip section of the grounding spring shown in Fig. 4a.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments:

20 Referring now to the figures of the drawing in detail and first, particularly, to Fig. 1 thereof, there is shown a cassette for holding a photoblack in a mask-generating system (electron-beam writer MEBES) having a holding plate 1 formed with a central depression 2 or recess. The surface of the
25 central depression 2 forms a supporting surface 3 for a photoblack 4. The photoblack 4 comprises a polished quartz

plate 5, to the surface of which a metal layer about 100 nm thick, for example a chromium layer 6, and a photoresist layer 7 about 400 nm thick arranged above the first have been applied. A arrow X shows the direction in which an electron beam is directed onto the photoblack 4 in order to generate a mask.

The photoblack 4 is fixed in position by means of a hold-down 8 fixed to the holding plate 1, by being pressed onto the supporting surface 3. For this purpose, the hold-down 8 has, at its end remote from the holding plate, a dome-like fixing element 9, which can consist of sapphire, for example, and forms an essentially point-like contact area with the surface of the photoblack 4.

A number of such hold-downs 8 can be provided on the holding plate 1. The illustration is limited to one for purposes of clarity.

A grounding spring 10 is provided for the purpose of making electrical contact between the chromium layer 6 of the photoblack 4 and the holding plate 1. The grounding spring 10 essentially comprises a leaf spring 12, which is firmly fixed mechanically and with good electrical contact with the metallic holding plate 1 by two screw connections 11. The leaf spring 12 extends essentially parallel to the surface 13 of

the holding plate 1 and, at its free end 14, projects beyond the central depression 2 of the holding plate 1. Fitted to the free end 14 is a contact-making tip 15 which, for example, can be formed in a cone shape or, as illustrated in Fig. 1, as a polygonal tip. The tip 15 is in good electrical contact with the chromium layer 6. As a result, the chromium layer 6 is connected to the ground potential of the holding plate 1 via the grounding spring 10.

10 In the vicinity of a step formation 16 belonging to the central depression 2, the leaf spring 12 is also provided with a threaded hole 17, into which a Teflon-coated setting screw 18 is screwed. The setting screw 18 rests with its threaded end on the surface 13 of the holding plate 1, so that the height of the contact-making tip 15 over the surface of the quartz plate 5 can be set very precisely via the rotational position of the setting screw 18.

Fig. 2 shows the holding device illustrated in Fig. 1 in plan view. Although the hold-down 8 and the grounding spring 10 are arranged adjacent to each other here, it is likewise possible to provide these elements at a greater distance from each other.

25 The functional operation of the holding device according to the invention is as follows:

First, the photoblank 4 is inserted into the depression 2 in the holding plate 1. For this purpose, both the hold-down 8 and the grounding spring 10 have previously been dismantled from the holding plate 1, so that the depression 2 is freely accessible. After the insertion of the photoblank 4, the latter is fixed in its position relative to the holding plate 1 by means of mounting the hold-down 8. The photoblank 4 is then grounded by fitting the grounding spring 10. For this purpose, the leaf spring 12 is firmly screwed to the holding plate 1 or to a spacer base 20 provided on the holding plate 1, via the two screw connections 11. Care is thereby taken that the contact-making tip 15 does not yet come into contact with the surface of the photoblank 4 at this point in time. This can be ensured, for example, in that before the mounting, the setting screw 18 is screwed sufficiently far into the threaded hole 17 to ensure the spacing. Another possibility is to utilize the elasticity of the leaf spring 12 and to keep the contact-making tip 15 away from the surface of the photoblank 4 during the mounting by means of a suitable aid.

After the fitting of the screw connections 11, the contact-making tip 15 is lowered onto the surface of the photoblank 4 in a controlled way. In the first-mentioned case, this is carried out by the setting screw 18 being unscrewed by a defined amount from the threaded hole 17. In the process, the

contact-making tip 15 is lowered onto the surface of the photoblack 4 and penetrates into the two upper layers 6 and 7 of the latter. The impressing pressure is in this case determined by the shape elasticity of the leaf spring 12, which depends on the material, the dimensioning and the optional shaping (see Fig. 3a) of the leaf spring 12, and can be predefined by varying these parameters. It has been shown that a permanent and reproducible electrical contact with the chromium layer 6 can be achieved even with relatively low pressing pressures. This is important, since, in particular in the case of thin photoblanks, undesired bending of the photoblack can occur as a result of the exertion of pressure. Provision is therefore made for the pressing pressure always to be set so low, depending on the thickness or flexural rigidity of the photoblack used, that bending of the photoblack is reliably avoided.

The second-mentioned option (lowering the contact-making tip 15 by means of an aid) offers the advantage that the setting screw 18 does not need to be rotated for this operation. By means of the exact pre-positioning of the setting screw 18, it is therefore possible for a desired final-position travel of the contact-making tip 15 to be maintained with very precise dimensions.

It is important that, in both procedures, lateral relative movement between the photoblank 4 and the contact-making tip 15 when the tip is being applied is effectively prevented.

5 Fig. 3a shows a possible shaping of a suitable leaf spring 12 in the unstressed state. In this case, a bend 19 has been formed between the drilled holes 21 provided for the screw connections 11 and the threaded hole 17, at which bend the leaf spring 12 is bent over through an angle α of, for
10 example, 5° with respect to its straight course.

The leaf spring 12 may be formed of a CuSn alloy (bronze), for example a CuSn₆ alloy with a 6% proportion of tin, or of a CuBe alloy.

15

The free end 14 of the leaf spring 12 is illustrated in enlarged form in Figs. 4a and 4b. At its free end 14, the leaf spring 12 has a hole 22 into which the pin-like contact-making tip 15 is pressed. The contact-making tip 15 can be secured in
20 the area of the hole 22 with a conductive adhesive. As a result of the press fit and the conductive adhesive which may additionally be provided, a low-resistance electrical connection between the leaf spring 12 and the contact-making tip 15 is achieved.

25

The contact-making tip 15 is formed, in its forward end, as a triangular tip, the three edges in each case being arranged at an angle of 120° to one another. The tip 15 is provided with a sharp-edged and burr-free precision-ground finish. A cutting face 23 formed between two cutting edges is in this case inclined at an angle β of about 30° with respect to the mid-axis of the contact-making tip 15.

The contact-making tip 15 preferably consists of a hard metal of the GTD type, which has a high hardness and a good electrical conductivity and, in addition, does not contain any magnetic components which disrupt the beam geometry.

We claim:

1. A method of grounding a photoblack provided with an electrically conductive layer in a holding device, which comprises:

positioning the photoblack on a supporting surface of a holding device;

providing a leaf spring with a contact-making tip mounted thereon;

lowering the contact-making tip onto a surface of the photoblack in a controlled manner with a position-adjusting element, which is connected to the leaf spring and forms an adjustable stop on the holding device, by adjusting the position-adjusting element by a defined amount, whereby the contact-making tip is lowered onto the surface of the photoblack and penetrates the surface with a predetermined impressing pressure.

2. The method according to claim 1, which comprises, prior to mounting the leaf spring on the holding device, turning the position-adjusting element sufficiently far into a threaded hole formed in the leaf spring for securing a spacing.

3. The method according to claim 1, wherein the position-adjusting element is a setting screw.

4. The method according to claim 1, which comprises fixing a position of the photoblack with at least one hold-down fitted to the holding device and clamping the photoblack firmly with pressure on the surface of the photoblack.

5. The method according to claim 1, wherein, in an unstressed state, the leaf spring is formed with a bend at which a longitudinal extent of the leaf spring deviates by an angle α from a rectilinear course.

6. The method according to claim 5, wherein the angle α is between 2° and 15°.

7. A method of grounding a photoblack provided with an electrically conductive layer in a holding device, which comprises:

positioning a photoblack on a supporting surface of a holding device;

providing a leaf spring with a contact-making tip fitted thereto;

mounting and prepositioning a position-adjusting element on the leaf spring for forming an adjustable stop on the holding device;

holding the leaf spring away from the surface of the photobank with an element other than the position-adjusting element; and

subsequently to positioning the photobank, lowering the leaf spring onto the photobank controlled manner;

whereby a final-position travel is predefined by the pre-positioned position-adjusting element.

8. The method according to claim 7, wherein the position-adjusting element is a setting screw.

9. The method according to claim 7, which comprises fixing a position of the photobank with at least one hold-down fitted to the holding device and clamping the photobank firmly with pressure on the surface of the photobank.

10. The method according to claim 7, wherein, in an unstressed state, the leaf spring is formed with a bend at which a longitudinal extent of the leaf spring deviates by an angle α from a rectilinear course.

11. The method according to claim 10, wherein the angle α is between 2° and 15°.

Figure 1 consists of 10 histograms, labeled (a) through (j), showing the distribution of the number of non-zero elements in the vector x for different values of n . The histograms are arranged vertically. The x-axis for all histograms is 'Number of non-zero elements' ranging from 0 to 100. The y-axis is 'Frequency' ranging from 0 to 10. The distributions are centered around $n/2$, with the peak frequency increasing as n increases.

Label	n	Center (approx.)	Peak Frequency (approx.)
(a)	10	5	1
(b)	20	10	2
(c)	30	15	3
(d)	40	20	4
(e)	50	25	5
(f)	60	30	6
(g)	70	35	7
(h)	80	40	8
(i)	90	45	9
(j)	100	50	10

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that: my residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name; that I verily believe that I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled:

described and claimed in the specification bearing that title, that I understand the content of the specification, that I do not know and do not believe the same was ever known or used in the United States of America before my or our invention thereof, or patented or described in any printed publication in any country before my or our invention thereof or more than one year prior to this application, that the same was not in public use or on sale in the United States of America more than one year prior to this application, that the invention has not been patented or made the subject of an inventor's certificate issued before the date of this application in any country foreign to the United States of America on an application filed by me or my legal representatives or assigns more than twelve month prior to this application, that I acknowledge my duty to disclose information of which I am aware which is material to the examination of this application under 37 C.F.R. 1.56a, and that no application for patent or inventor's certificate of this invention has been filed earlier than the following in any country foreign to the United States prior to this application by me or my legal representatives or assigns:

German Application No. 198 11 081.2, filed March 13, 1998, the International Priority of which is claimed under 35 U.S.C. §119; and International Application No. PCT/DE99/00675, filed March 11, 1999, the Priority of which is claimed under 35 U.S.C. §120.

I hereby appoint the following attorney(s) and/or agent(s) to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith:

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I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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Abstract of the Disclosure:

A photobank is held in a holding device with a holding body formed with a supporting surface for the photobank. A grounding element can be brought into electrical contact with an electrically conductive layer of the photobank. The grounding element has a contact-making tip which can be manipulated in such a way that it can be brought down onto the photobank and inserted into the holding device essentially without any lateral relative movement with respect to the photobank.

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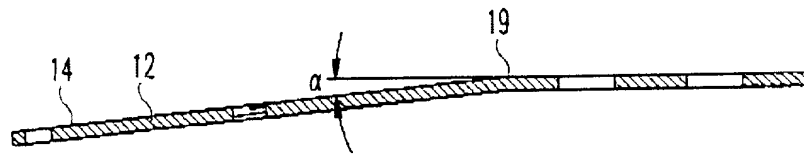


Fig. 3a

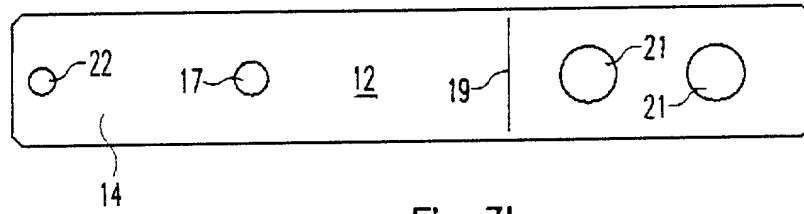


Fig. 3b

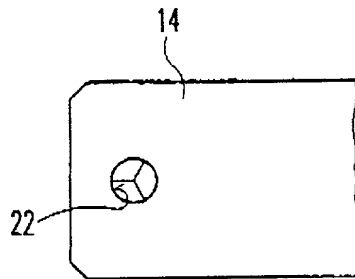


Fig. 4a

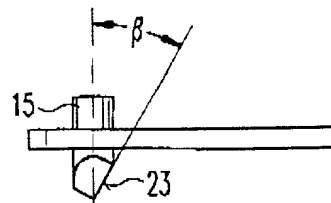


Fig. 4b